

What did you learn?

Through out the trip I gained a lot of knowledge, experience, and a new perspective. At each park I was able to talk to the Park Rangers who exposed me on the current state of the parks, and expressed what made each park so special. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the parks are environmentally doing well, and that people are doing their part in respecting the lands. Although the parks are protected right now, this does not mean they will be in the future. Recently the budget of the National Parks took a hit, and I hope that by sharing my photos and experiences from the National Parks it will encourage more tourism, and increase the desire to protect these lands. I also learned a lot about photography when it came to the different environments and landscapes. I experienced to appreciate light and that with out it photography is nearly impossible. Through trial and error I was able to become proficient in my manual shooting skills. And lastly, I learned a lot about the process of budgeting and the cost of traveling. There was a lot more thought that goes into budgeting than I previously anticipated, and no matter how much you plan, your budget will not be perfect.



Southold, NY - 1 (Cuyahoga Valley Nat'l Park), 2 (Badlands Nat'l Park), 3 (Grand Teton Nat'l Park), 4 (Yellowstone Nat'l Park), 5 (North Cascades Nat'l Park), 6 (Olympic Nat'l Park), 7 (Crater Lake Nat'l Park), 8 (Redwood Nat'l Park), 9 (Lassen Volcanic Nat'l Park), 10 (Yosemite Nat'l Park), 11 (Death Valley Nat'l Park), 12 (Zion Nat'l Park), 13 (Grand Canyon Nat'l Park), 14 (Arches Nat'l Park), 15 (Rocky Mountain Nat'l Park) - Southold, NY

How did your experience impact you personally?

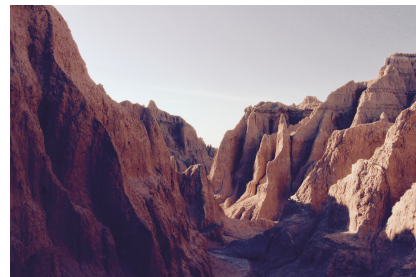
Personally, the National Parks had a lasting effect on me. Their diversity amazed me, their pureness enlightened me, and their existence inspires me. I have definitely developed a better appreciation for nature and all it has to offer from this project. In addition I learned to live more in the moment, and that it is ok to take a second to appreciate what is around me. Today in society everything runs on time, and we never stop. But when exploring National Parks, time was on the back burner, while I was in awe of the natural wonders surrounding me.

STEP transformed my perspective on America, my appreciation for nature, and my overall evaluation of the vital things in life. There is no other opportunity or experience like STEP where I would be able to create my own project and have the freedom to pursue a passion of mine like photography. My STEP project was truly a life changing experience that I will have for the rest of my life. I have the photos to remind me everyday of this experience and the changed mind in hopefully being able to make more people appreciate our National Parks. The National Parks made me reevaluate my perspective of America and the capabilities of nature, and maybe they can do the same for you.

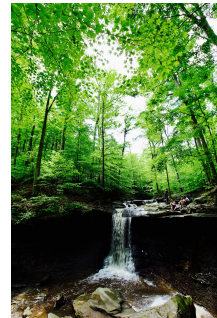
CAPTURED PARKS

Experience Description:

My project was a creative and artistic endeavor on photo documenting the current state of the National Parks. The goal was to capture the National Parks and learn about the well being of these natural wonders while developing myself. This three week journey started at the end of Long Island, went across to the North Pacific, down to Arizona, and back to the East Coast. Along the way I visited fifteen National Parks, traveled through twenty-one states, took thousands of photos, and created priceless memories.



Badlands Nat'l Park, SD



Cuyahoga Valley Nat'l Park, OH



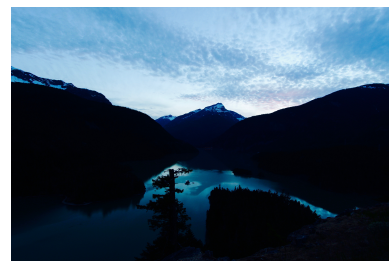
Yosemite Nat'l Park, CA



Death Valley Nat'l Park, CA



Arches Nat'l Park, UT



North Cascades Nat'l Park, WA



Olympic Nat'l Park, WA

How did your experience impact your academic, personal, and life goals moving forward?

Academically this experience deeply expanded my knowledge on National Parks in the United States. Moving forward I want to learn more about the National Parks in what I can do in helping protect them. In addition, I am more educated in the National Parks from talking with Park Rangers. This reminded me of the great resource people can be when it comes to academics in general. Personally, I was able to practice my photography everyday, and capture photos in various environments. Moving forward I am a lot more confident and experienced in my photography ability. With my new camera and skills I can now capture better photos to share with the world. This trip also greatly assisted in my life goal of traveling. One of my traveling goals includes traveling to all 50 states. After this trip I have now traveled to 45 of 50 states! Moving forward I have only 5 states left to visit, and I am now confident in my ability to travel to these states myself and budget a plan to accomplish it.

STEP

SECOND-YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL
EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

Name: Willow Sutton

STEP Faculty member: Ann Christy

Major: Biology



Yellowstone Nat'l Park, WY

Favorite part of your experience:

My favorite part of this experience was exploring all the different parts of the United States. Most of the time when I think of traveling I am mostly focused on the places abroad I can travel to. But after this trip I am fascinated by the places right here in the U.S. I also really enjoyed just being in places with absolutely no cellular service, and where only a minority of the world has had the fortunate opportunity of traveling to. This was extremely humbling, and made me very grateful for this experience. Every single park was unique and beautiful in its own way. From the little waterfalls right here in Cuyahoga Valley, OH, to the rapidly changing landscapes of the Badlands, to the reflective lakes of Grand Teton, to the geysers in Yellowstone, to the endless waterfalls in the North Cascades, to my coldest rain forest experience in Olympic, to the bluest lake I've ever seen in Crater Lake, to the largest and widest trees in Redwoods, to the unpleasant smell of sulfur in Lassen Volcanic, to the most diverse weather ever in Yosemite, to the saltiest ground in Death Valley, to the hike through a river in Zion, to the endless views in the Grand Canyon, to the enormous and vibrant arches of Arches, and to the highest of elevations in Rocky Mountain this trip was unforgettable. I loved every second of this opportunity to explore these natural wonders with my best friend. I am extremely thankful and grateful for this once in a life time opportunity given to me through STEP.